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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the book "The Bell Curve" by Harvard psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Alan Murray. The paper asserts as the book's main points and implications: (1) one's socioeconomic place in life is now determined by IQ rather than family wealth and influence; (2) ruling white elites, who have benefited from better homes, books, conversation, and education, pass these advantages along to their children; (3) white high IQ rich are getting richer but having fewer children than the lower IQ majority and will be swamped by them; (4) East Asian Americans have, on average, 3 points higher IQ than whites who average 15 points higher IQ than African-Americans; (5) America's bell curve begins a normal IQ spread with high IQs of 125 and over labeled Class I cognitive elites including 5 percent or 12.5 million Americans followed by Class II brights with IQs 110-125, and then Class III IQs of 90-110 to which half the U.S. population belongs, and lastly Class IV dull IQs 75-90 and Class V very dull IQs 50-75 to which 5 percent or 12.5 million Americans belong; and (6) the worst fear scenario suggested by the book is that, in self-protection, from low IQ underclass violence, crime and drug abuse, high IQ elites will restrict and control dullards in reservations. The bulk of the paper is devoted to selected quotes by noted leaders in the education field criticizing the United States' over-reliance on IQ testing. The main criticisms center around: (1) the book as a mirror of a national direction in a time of change; (2) the book as negative and racially divisive; (3) the book reflective of present social discontent; and (4) the book representing a clash of American values. Contains 23 references. (EH)

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The Bell Curve: Review of Reviews*

by Franklin and Betty J. Parker

This paper tells why *The Bell Curve* is so controversial (because it says IQ controls our place in life), why the book recently appeared (part of a trend to reverse twentieth century equality of opportunity), and what the book says about America's direction (dangerously confrontational). But first the book's main points and implications.

Point 1: Our socio-economic place in life, once determined by family wealth and influence, is now determined by IQ; i.e., genetically fixed intelligence.

Point 2: Ruling white elites, who have benefited for generations from better homes, books, talk, and education, pass these advantages on to their children, who largely intermarry.

Point 3: White high IQ rich are getting richer but have fewer children than and will be swamped by the lower IQ majority.

Point 4: East Asian Americans have on average 3 points higher IQs than whites, who average 15 points higher IQ than African-Americans. These racial IQ differences have been constant since 1900.

Point 5: America's bell curve, or normal IQ spread, begins with high IQs of 125 and over, labeled Class I cognitive elites, including 5 per cent or 12.5 million Americans. Next are Class II brights with IQs 110-125. Half the U. S. population are in the middle bulge, Class III IQs of 90-110. Left of the bulge is Class IV dull IQs 75-90. Extreme left is Class V very dull IQs 50-75, 5 per cent or 12.5 million Americans.

Point 6: *The Bell Curve*'s worst fear scenario is that, in self protection from growing low IQ underclass violence, crime, drug abuse, and illegitimacy, high IQ elites will restrict and control dullards in reservations. Now, about the authors.

Author Richard J. Herrnstein, Harvard psychologist, died just before publication of *The Bell Curve*. A City College of New York graduate, he studied under behaviorist B. F. Skinner (1904-90) at Harvard; later chaired Harvard's psychology department. His September 1971 *Atlantic Monthly* article held that genetic IQ differences make inequality inevitable in jobs, class, and income; affirmative action and welfare do not work and are wasteful. These views led 1970s student protesters to harass Herrnstein. (Brimelow)

Co-author Charles Alan Murray, American Enterprise Institute political scientist, has a Harvard B.A. degree, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand, and has an MIT political science Ph.D. degree. His 1985 book, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*, found welfare programs ineffective, including Pres. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.(Murray 1985) Murray's endorsement of tax breaks for industry to stimulate production; i.e., the trickle down theory, made him President Reagan's favorite social scientist.

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Murray says that our attitude on welfare changed from limited and temporary aid to near permanent government handouts, often generational and expected as a right. That change in welfare came from 1970s student protesters, President Johnson's Great Giveaways, and from civil rights demands. It was a mistake, he said, to make welfare more attractive and more rewarding than the American work ethic. Who praised *The Bell Curve* book?

Here's one <u>praise</u>: 'The Bell Curve' makes a strong case that America's population is becoming dangerously polarized between a smart, rich, educated elite and a population of unintelligent, poor and uneducated people."(Browne)

Another praise: Herrnstein and Murray [say that] "those determined to use the coercive power of government to achieve equality of results in education, social standing, income, etc.,...are hopeless Utopians,...certain to end in failure and frustration. *The Bell Curve* is a bullet right through the heart of socialism."(Buchanan)

Another praise: "Murray and Herrnstein were right about one thing: it pays to choose your parents carefully."(Adler)

Still another praise: [The authors] "are right in saying that there is no proven way to raise IQs."(Besharov)

Now, the more frequent <u>critical</u> quotes: "*The Bell Curve*...is scientifically flawed," a criticism frequently made.(Book)

Another criticism: "Save for a few racist eugenicists and half-baked opinions, the consensus among scholars is that Murray and Herrnstein are wrong."(Boyd)

"The fact that most African-Americans...descended from people who endured more than 300 years of bondage and discrimination seems to have been of little significance to Murray and Herrnstein."(Boyd)

"There are other kinds of 'intelligence' that are crucial [in] determining a person's performance in life, [including] common sense, experience, intuition, creativity and...social intelligence."(Allman)

"In any field, such as art, technology, teaching and science, creativity is at least as important as IQ."(Allman)

[The book] "abuses science to promote far-right policies."(Beardsley)

"As the country lurches to the right, many people will be seduced by the text's academic trappings and scientific tone.... Those readers should think again."(Beardsley)

"The work is a string of half-truths."(Beardsley)

"Biological determinism...led...long ago to compulsory sterilization...and genocide."(Beardsley)

"*The Bell Curve*...comes from a cold and dark place in American thought."(Bellicose)

"If you take this [book] seriously, eugenics is just around the corner."(Bellicose)

"*The Bell Curve* is a house of cards constructed to push a political agenda--[It is] an attack on affirmative action, the welfare system, and schools that fail the gifted...[The book] could trigger

insidious discrimination....[It justifies] the slamming [of doors of opportunity] on the grounds of lower intelligence. That's not the kind of America we want."(Carey)

The Bell Curve...encourage[s] the crudest...most subtle form of racism."(Fischel)

Last critical quote: "For black children who need a load lifted from their backs, Murray and Herrnstein just add more baggage, delivering a gloomy message of predestination and racial caste."(Reiland)

Let us examine more closely key reviewers' criticism of *The Bell Curve*:

Harvard educational psychologist Howard Gardner says Herrnstein and Murray are "intoxicated with the IQ test." Gardner doubts the existence of a single measured intelligence. There are many kinds of intelligences which cannot be measured by IQ tests. Genes may regulate human behavior, but learning alters the way genes function. Intelligence is as much acquired as it is inborn. Expectations of parents and teachers, plus many other factors, affect IQ.

Gardner says the *Bell Curve* authors are dangerously confrontational in pitting high IQers against low IQers, us against them. *The Bell Curve* ignores successful social and educational intervention programs for deprived children. These ignored successful programs negate *The Bell Curve*'s callous assertion that aiding the poor is futile.

Murray and Herrnstein invite class warfare, says Gardner, when they expect readers to identify with high IQers and distance themselves from low IQers.(Gardner)

Critical reviewer Alan Ryan sees Herrnstein's genetic IQ obsession combined with Murray's anti-welfare obsession as resulting in politics that is "at best slightly mad and at worst plain ugly."(Ryan)

The authors' view of a cast-ridden America, says Ryan, leads them to write "what people already think in their...hearts:"...that blacks and white trash are born irremediably dumb; that government-forced affirmative action has displaced smart whites with incompetent blacks.

Critical reviewer Nancy Cole is Educational Testing Service president and former education dean, universities of Pittsburgh and Illinois. She says *The Bell Curve* ignores the role of education.

If IQ alone determines one's place in life, she says, then nothing is left for school, learning, education, teachers, and teacher education. If you can't improve people, why have schools at all?

Educating only high IQers and neglecting the rest, she continues, is "dangerous...social policy.... This book...is...totally negative." It supports those who deny learning opportunities for all children.(Cole)

Critical reviewer Charles Lane says *The Bell Curve* is racially biased. Five articles cited in *Bell Curve* are from *Mankind Quarterly*, a pro-white, anti-black anthropology journal. Seventeen scholars cited in *The Bell Curve* contributed to *Mankind Quarterly*, 10 of them being present or past editors or on its editorial board.(Lane, Mercer, Rosen and Lane)

Mankind Quarterly's founding purpose, says Lane, was to counter "communist" and "egalitarian" influences. One *Mankind Quarterly* founder championed South African apartheid.

Another was active in U.S. White Citizens' Councils and testified before the U.S. Supreme Court against the 1954 *Brown* desegregation decision.

Mankind Quarterly is financed by the Pioneer Fund, a New York foundation, which is pro-eugenics and white supremacist, says Lane.(Reed) A Pioneer Fund letter in 1989 said that the U.S. should abandon integration because "raising the intelligence of blacks...still remains beyond our capabilities."(Mercer)

Thirteen scholars whose works are listed in *The Bell Curve* received over $4 million in Pioneer Fund research grants. One of these thirteen scholars said: blacks from Africa have lower IQs than African Americans because most African Americans have some white genes.

Critic Lane faults the authors for not disclosing the racial views of their sources. He faults them for promoting eugenics.

Critical reviewer Robert J. Samuelson said: "[Those who attack] meritocracy are nuts.... If the Founding Fathers ever envisioned an ideal social order, it was surely a meritocracy: a system under which people succeed mainly on the basis of ability and effort."(Samuelson)

Samuelson adds: "[Our] meritocracy is now under furious intellectual assault" in *The Bell Curve*, whose thesis is simply not true. We are not ruled by cognitive elites. Consider the expanding number of U.S. managers and professionals. Between 1940-93, the labor force doubled. But managers quadrupled from 3.8 million to 15.4 million, engineers quintupled from 300,000 to 1.7 million, lawyers increased from 182,000 to 777,000, and physicians from 168,000 to 605,000.

We live in an enormously fluid society, says Samuelson. This is the central point Herrnstein and Murray miss or minimize. The success of the people at the top does not cause the poverty of the people at the bottom.

"[Our] meritocracy," Samuelson says, "is a huge advance over ...barriers of race, sex, religion, and ethnicity. Life is unfair...but it is not rigged,...not in America."

One conclusion is that, like past perceptive writers, *The Bell Curve* authors try to mirror a national direction in a time of change. Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, echoed the yearning of the uprooted exile. David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* lamented outer directed conformity and regretted the too few inner directed risk takers. C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* saw the U.S.A. run by government-military-corporate elites. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* opened our eyes to large poverty hidden in urban slums and off the main rural highways. Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*, rejected by most educators 25 years ago, now seems--to choice, voucher, and charter school advocates-- an alternative to public school monopoly. These authors and themes, trying to explain their times, often overstate their insight.

The Bell Curve is negative and racially divisive. Its theme, that "biology is destiny," is repressive, like George Orwell's *1984*, all-controlling, like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

The Bell Curve reflects our present discontents, seen in the November 1994 Republican election victory, Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America," the rightist U.S. Supreme Court, and attacks on affirmative action.

A final conclusion: *The Bell Curve* represents a clash of American values.

The founding Puritan elite embraced hard work, free enterprise, free markets, laissez faire government, big business, international corporations, profits, and--by extension--testing and IQ for economic efficiency. This Puritan ethic was challenged by new liberal baby boomers, reared in suburban comfort, given greater educational opportunities, and shaped by anti-Vietnam, pro-civil rights liberalism.

The new liberals were sensitized by the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; radicalized by the civil rights movement; and galvanized by anti-Vietnam War and anti-big business. Liberals opposed IQ and testing as racist and unfair, favored affirmative action and compensatory education to level the playing field, and give have nots a long denied advantage.

That clash still exists between nature and nurture advocates, IQ testers and compensatory education advocates, haves and have nots, high IQers and low IQers.

Right-wing *Bell Curve* elites are wrong. IQ is not everything. Education, Head Start, Follow Through, other enriching experiences, make a difference. We need to reaffirm equality of opportunity.

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